

# Year Two of the Electronic Portfolio Project at the University of Florida

Gail Ring, University of Florida, US

**Abstract** In this session I will report the results of the first year of implementation of the electronic portfolio project in the College of Education at the University of Florida. I will address the successes of the project as well as project weaknesses.

## Background

The college of education at the University of Florida has completed its first full year of implementation of the Electronic Portfolio Project in which all preservice teachers are required to develop, publish, and maintain electronic teaching portfolios. During this first year we have learned what contributes to the success of such a program as well as what impedes its success.

## The Purpose

All students majoring in Early Elementary Education, Elementary Education, and Secondary Education at the University of Florida are required to develop and maintain an electronic teaching portfolio. The purposes of the portfolio are to:

- present illustrations of competency in the 12 Florida Accomplished Practices;
- promote the use and integration of technology in the educational experience at UF;
- promote the development of a professional vita;
- provide a forum for connecting a student's university experience to personal and professional insights;
- provide a better understanding of professional requirements for certification beyond the University of Florida, i.e., National Board Certification.

In addition, our students have come up with different ways to use their portfolios. For example, some students use(d) their portfolio as a teaching tool, others as a way to push themselves to learn more about innovative uses of technology.

## Strengths of the program

The Electronic Portfolio Program has enabled the college to involve students in their education. Students have commented that throughout their program they were often just taking classes, not really thinking about what it was they were learning. More than one student noted that the development of the portfolio enabled them to step back from their assignments and reflect on what they were learning and its relevance to their teaching. Student comments such as: "After I began to work on my portfolio and put all the elements together, I began to see that I really had learned a lot!" reiterate that reflection is a necessary element of the portfolio development process.

## Weaknesses of the Program

The first year taught us a great deal about the implementation of a college-wide innovation. We learned that the success of the project is directly correlated to the level of classroom integration. In other words if the faculty don't actively support the project the students are often going to feel that it is an add on and will go away, or that no one will look at the portfolios so they can be put together quickly at the end of the semester.

## Student Benefits

The e-portfolio was designed as way to encourage students to make connections between the theories they are learning in their courses, their assignments, and the authentic experiences they have in their field work. In addition, developing a web-based portfolio of their work enables students to learn how to use and integrate technology throughout their graduate program. This provides our students with technological fluency. In addition, through their reflective (rationale) statements students provide tangible evidence that they have a clear understanding of the Florida Accomplished Practices.

#### Programmatic Benefits

The portfolio project is part of an intensive change effort at the college, and as such has the potential to impact the curriculum, level of technology integration, and evaluation. Change, however, is rarely easy and not embraced quickly and evenly. Although many professors had little involvement with the portfolio project in the first year, by the second year, many are beginning to discuss portfolios with their students and seeking ways to integrate the electronic portfolio project in their courses. In addition, many professors who have not previously used technology in their teaching are taking advantage of the faculty development opportunities available to them in the college.

#### Future Directions

As we proceed with the project we continue to have many questions about portfolio development such as: What factors in the development process contribute to richer student learning? How will developing a portfolio contribute to students' ability to reflect about their own work and their own progress? How does developing a portfolio contribute to the students' perceptions of themselves and their own abilities? As we continue to work with our students and their portfolio development, we hope to address these issues.